

2018 State of the State Address
Governor Eric R. Greitens

Thank you, Lieutenant Governor Parson; Speaker Richardson and the members of the Missouri House; President Pro Tem Richard and members of the Missouri Senate; Chief Justice Fischer and judges of the Supreme Court; State officials; Members of the Cabinet; Our First Lady, and my wife, Sheena Greitens.

We have many honored guests here tonight. One who is particularly special to me is my kindergarten teacher, Anne Richardson, who is here.

I was in Mrs. Richardson's Kindergarten class at McKelvey Elementary, and it was at McKelvey Elementary that I first heard the story of a boy from the town of Diamond, Missouri.

He was born over a century ago, and he was born a slave. When he was a baby, he and his mother were kidnapped. He never saw his mother again, but by God's grace, he found a loving home, and a new family that raised him as their own.

Now, at the time, no school in town would admit a black student, so his parents taught him how to read and to write. When he was older, they sent him to Neosho, about 10 miles down the road, where there was a school that opened its doors to him. He worked hard, and he did well. So well, in fact, that he was admitted to an agricultural college.

This was a tough time for American farmers. Their land was losing its richness, and no one could figure out a fix. The young man from Diamond invented new ways to grow crops. He traveled the country fixing farms, sometimes one-by-one, helping rural communities grow strong and feed more people. By some reports, he is the man who rescued American agriculture.

When George Washington Carver was born, he was considered, by many, to be property on a plantation. He became, an American hero, a friend of Presidents, a counselor to everyone from the Secretary of Agriculture to Mahatma Gandhi. His face was on postage stamps, and his name on a Navy submarine. He was, and he remains, one of us: a Missourian. His story is our story.

George Washington Carver passed away 75 years ago this month. As we begin our work, in this time and this place, we should celebrate his life. We should remember where he started and how far he went. We Missourians know that the contributions that have counted most have often come from people who were, at one time, counted out.

I was sent here, and I believe that many of you were sent here, not to work for the connected or the comfortable, but for those who have felt counted out and forgotten. They are strong and proud, and while they may not have pull or power or privilege, they do have enormous potential. To those Missourians, I have a simple message: We have been and we will fight for you every single day.

We promised we'd fight for your jobs, and we are. The most important thing we can do for Missouri families is to make it easier for those without jobs to find them and make sure that those who have jobs keep them. Over the past year, we have devoted the energy and attention of our office to putting Missourians back to work.

Here are the results: Today, Missouri has the lowest unemployment rate it's had in 17 years. Since last March, we have outpaced the nation in job growth, and in the past year, Missouri moved up nine spots in the rankings of the best states in the country to do business. There are more manufacturing jobs in our state than there were a year ago. We're putting a steel mill in Sedalia, Missouri, and we are competing for more steel mills and other plants around the state.

We are bringing good quality jobs back to Missouri. Now, we haven't fixed in one year what was broken over the course of many decades, and many Missourians still struggle. We have a lot of work left to do, but tonight, we can say: there are more jobs in Missouri than ever before, people are going back to work, and we are moving Missouri in a new and better direction.

Some of the people who need us most, who are counting on us, are the children in the Missouri foster care system, all 13,000 of them. We live in a compassionate state: there are thousands of loving families in Missouri who have opened their homes and their hearts to foster children. In fact, some foster and adoptive families are with us in the balconies this evening. Please join me in recognizing them.

A year ago, if a child in foster care needed a copy of their own birth certificate to apply for a driver's license or to get a job, they had to pay for it out of their own pocket. Today, we can proudly say they can get that birth certificate without having to give the government their money.

A year ago, a child entering our foster system may not have known their rights. This is an issue that many of you have cared about for a long time and worked on for a long time. And I was proud to join with you to sign into law a "Foster Care Bill of Rights."

Last month, Missouri officially joined the National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise to make adoption easier across state lines. I want to give a special thank you for her hard work on this issue to the First Lady of the State of Missouri, my wife, Sheena Greitens.

Our team has been working with members of this body on twenty legislative initiatives to help children in need. Some of these initiatives will help reform and improve Missouri's adoption system, so we can get children into safe, stable, and loving homes faster. Another would help foster children get access to bank accounts, so they can save their money. Together, these twenty legislative initiatives will make a meaningful difference in the lives of the children of the state of Missouri.

As many of you know, before I joined the military, I worked with children in some of the world's most difficult places. I worked with children who'd lost their homes. Kids who had lost limbs to landmines. Children who'd lost their parents to violence. That work taught me that the damage done to children, too often, leads people to look at them as only damaged children. People see their problems and pain, but they miss their courage. They see their scars. They don't see their strength.

Every child in the Missouri foster care system has seen more than their fair share of hardship. We need to see in them their God-given potential, and we need to do everything in our power to help them to fulfill it.

Tonight, I want to ask the members of this body to do something straightforward: Put politics on hold. Set any differences you may have with one another, or with me, to the side. These are children. These are kids. There are 13,000 of them. We must love them and care for them as if they were our own, because, in law and spirit, they are. Tonight, let's join together, and pledge to get this work done for the kids who need us most.

One of the most important things we can do for those kids, and for their families, and for families throughout Missouri, is to continue to bring more good jobs back to our state.

For Missouri to prosper, we need to get government off our backs. When we came into office, we looked at the burden of regulations and red tape on our farms, ranches, businesses, homes, neighborhoods, and communities. We had almost 7,000 regulations and 112,000 regulatory requirements on the books, adding up to more than seven million words in total. Here's how bad things got in Missouri: Since 2002, regulatory requirements in our state grew at a faster—yes, a faster—rate than the regulations imposed on us by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

In Missouri, there was a regulation on the books that forced some small businesses to install and pay for a land line phone, even if they didn't want it and didn't use it. If you haul milk for a living, the government requires you to do a training. Now, it's a training that could be done online, on your own time, but because of outdated regulations, you've got to go to a meeting set up by the government to do it.

Regulations like these that waste money, waste time, are outdated and irrelevant had been building up for too long, like plaque in the arteries of Missouri's economy. These regulations cost Missourians money. They raise the prices of the things we buy. They slow down our mills, our farms, our factories, our shops. And they make government more bloated and more burdensome.

Because of this, we launched the most aggressive, most thorough, most ambitious effort to roll back unnecessary regulations in the United States. By taking a strong, thoughtful, conservative approach to government, we can tell you tonight that we are taking nearly one out of every three regulatory requirements in the state of Missouri—that's 33,000 regulatory requirements—off the books for good.

Missouri has become a leader. In fact, other states have modeled their regulatory reforms on what we are doing to increase liberty and prosperity in the state of Missouri. My team and I will continue to eliminate regulations that are unproductive and unnecessary, and, when we need legislation to roll back regulations, we will work with you.

But there is more we need to do to grow jobs in our state. Some of these we've talked about before: Making sure that we have the right laws on the books to be fair to family businesses, and making strategic investments in education, infrastructure, and workforce development. Yet one of the best investments we can make in Missouri, is also one of the most straightforward: cut taxes and put money back into the pockets of the people of Missouri.

Last year, we faced a choice: we could cut spending or raise taxes. I'm proud to say that we cut spending, and we did not raise taxes on the citizens of Missouri a single nickel.

Early next week, my team and I will lay out a detailed, thoughtful, and thorough plan to cut taxes on the hardest-working families in our state. It is the boldest state tax reform in America. And with your help, we will lower taxes for working families and make it easier for businesses to come to Missouri and create jobs. And we will do it in a way that is fiscally sound, maintains our state's triple-A credit rating, and does not burden our children with debt.

In 2018, I want this body to cut taxes for the people of Missouri, and to cut taxes for businesses that create jobs. Let's get it done.

Today, I'm proud to tell you that we continue to shrink the size of government. In fact, today the government of the state of Missouri is the smallest it's been in two decades. At the same time, we've been improving how government serves our citizens. To do this, we brought in a team of outsiders, with a clear mission: the most effective government at the lowest possible cost.

In the Department of Natural Resources, we discovered a backlog of over 2,000 permit applications that had been submitted by businesses. The backlog was decades old, and in just the last year, the Department sliced it in half. They actually found a permit that a company applied for in 1997. I'm happy to report to you tonight: it's been approved.

Not only that: they got all of this done while cutting the Department's size and spending less money, and even with a smaller and leaner department, they still managed to make sure that Missourians have the safest drinking water they've had in almost 20 years.

This type of change is happening across government. We found four planes that the government didn't need, and we sold them off. That also saved taxpayers almost \$40,000 a year in maintenance, money the government was paying for planes that nobody was using. We found 30 cars the government didn't need, and we're getting rid of them. That's going to save Missourians over \$500,000. Every year, the Governor's office printed thousands of pages of paper for its annual budget. And every year, many of those big books sat on shelves, unopened and collecting dust. So this year, we are putting the budget online and saving \$3,601.50 in printing costs.

We pay attention to dollars, and we pay attention to cents, because we remember: every single dollar this government spends was earned by the hard work of a Missourian, and this is the people's money.

For us to save dollars and serve citizens, we need to reform state workforce laws that are decades old. Today, government can't move people to where they will help the most, can't reward people for good work, and unlike a business, it can't get rid of poor performers who fail our citizens and fail their colleagues. We need your help to build a common sense government.

Speaking of common sense, our task force did a full audit of the Boards and Commissions in Missouri's government. They were in bad shape. For example, the state of Missouri has six Child Abuse and Neglect Review Boards. These Boards do important work to protect children across the state of Missouri. Four of the six them weren't able to hear cases because they didn't have enough members to meet. We fixed this. Now they'll be able to get to work to protect our kids.

To serve citizens well, government needs to do fewer things and do them better. For years, people have complained that Missouri government is chock full of redundant and unnecessary and wasteful Boards and Commissions. So our task force did a careful review—Board by Board, Commission by Commission—and recommended the elimination of hundreds of unnecessary government positions. Senator Riddle has introduced a bill that reflects these recommendations, and I urge this body to pass that bill.

That's how we make government smaller and better. We must also make sure that our public servants serve in the public's interest. We need to slam shut the door between the legislature and lobbyists, and we need to pass term limits for every state-wide office holder.

In my very first action as Governor, I signed an executive order banning gifts from lobbyists to state employees of the executive branch. A bill that would have done the same thing in the legislature passed the House last year. Thank you to Speaker Richardson and the Representatives who voted for it last year and who already took action on it again this year.

Last year, the bill stalled in the Senate. This year, both bodies need to get together and pass a ban on gifts from lobbyists to the legislature. But in the meantime, I have a simple request: I call on every member of the legislature to join me in a pledge not to accept any gift from lobbyists. Let's get this done for the people of Missouri.

We promised the people of Missouri that we would support our law enforcement officers and first responders, and that's what we've done.

There's an officer who, tonight, will step into the cold to keep Missourians safe. The wife of one police officer told our team that, when he leaves for the night, she can't be sure that he's home safe until she hears the Velcro of his body armor being taken off. This is what our law enforcement families experience every day.

Last year, some of our law enforcement officers gave their lives in the line of duty. Others were wounded. Last month, I visited the bedside of Officer Ryan O'Connor, after a criminal shot him in the back of the head. The day we went to visit him, as he was lying in a hospital bed just a few feet away, Officer O'Connor's 17-year-old son, Aiden, told me, that like his grandfather and his father, he too wanted to be a police officer.

Aiden, we want you and young people across the state of Missouri to know that serving your community as a police officer is a proud and noble profession. We're proud of you.

Last year, together with this body, we passed and signed Blue Alert legislation into law to help bring to justice and strengthen the penalties for anyone who attacks or injures a law enforcement officer. This year, we need to pass legislation that protects the health, safety, and well-being of our firefighters, police officers, and other first responders.

Some of these issues we've talked about before. One issue I want to raise tonight is the harassment of police officers. Today, in Missouri, radicals can file liens against a police officer's house. They can do this in secret, and it can affect the credit of our police officers and their families, costing them thousands of dollars. It's harassment, and it needs to stop. On behalf of

law enforcement officers throughout our state, I'd ask this body to pass a clean version of legislation that protects them from this type of harassment.

Tonight, I want to let the police officers of this state know: your Governor, your fellow citizens, and the vast majority of your elected representatives, we have your back.

We're also working to build the finest National Guard in the country, and I'm proud to say that we were able to add 800 National Guard jobs this past year. We want Missouri to be the best state in the country for veterans and military families.

We have members of the armed forces who get orders to come to Missouri to serve in places like Whiteman Air Force base and Ft. Leonard Wood. Today, what makes it hard for some of them is that, if their spouse is licensed to work in another state, Missouri may not recognize those licenses. That means, if your spouse has a career in dentistry in Tennessee, and your family is moved to Whiteman Air Force base, they may not be able to work here in Missouri. That needs to change. We need to grant full reciprocity of licenses obtained in other states to military members, veterans, and their spouses.

And there is more. Right now, in the state of Missouri, a small business owner who declares that he or she wants to hire veterans can be sued. That's right: if you say that you prefer to hire veterans, you could face a lawsuit. That's wrong. This legislature needs to pass a bill allowing employers to establish a veterans hiring preference. Most states in our country have done this. It's time for Missouri to do the same.

I had the honor of visiting with the men and women of Missouri's National Guard when they were serving overseas with US Central Command. The men and women from 1st Battalion, 138th Infantry Regiment, are home now, and I wanted all of you who are here today to be able to say to them: Welcome home, and we're proud of you. They're with us tonight, and I'd ask them to stand.

We promised the people of Missouri that we would fight for them. We have, and we will. We promised the people of Missouri we would do different. We have, and we will. We promised the people of Missouri that we would fight for the least among us, the counted out, and the forgotten. We have, and we will.

Tonight, we can look back with pride and look forward with confidence. We have come far in a year, and though we have a long way to go, the state of our state today reflects what the state of our people has always been: Missouri is strong, and she is getting stronger.

Thank you very much. God bless you, and God bless the people of Missouri.